

**“Toronto has everything”, “Toronto’s got it all”:
Ethnolinguistic Dimensions of *have* in Toronto English**

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The past centuries have seen a growing tendency for English speakers to variably replace main-verb *have* by the periphrastic construction *have got* (with auxiliary *have* contracted or even deleted), in both possessive (1) and deontic (2) functions:

- (1) a. Toronto **has** everything you could ever want. (TO.70:5)
- b. I mean, Toronto’s **got** it all. (TO.20:37)
- (2) a. You don’t **have to** do everything in the store. (TO.24:9)
- b. You **gotta** do everything. (TO.73:18)

Previous studies (e.g. Kroch 1989; Noble 1985) identify several language-internal constraints, as well as different preferences for each variant across regional varieties of English. In particular, Tagliamonte (2003, 2006) notes an ongoing rise in rates of *have* in Toronto. Given Toronto’s ethnolinguistic diversity and previous findings of different degrees of participation in ongoing phonological changes by different ethnic groups (Hoffman 2010; Hoffman & Walker 2010), we might ask whether lexical and grammatical changes show similar patterning.

In this paper, we investigate this question in a recently constructed corpus of Toronto English (Hoffman & Walker 2010) stratified according to ethnic background, generation and sex. From transcriptions of recorded sociolinguistic interviews with 55 speakers, we extracted every main-verb *have*, yielding a dataset of over 2,000 tokens. In addition to classifying the realization of the verb as HAVE (*have/’ve/’s*) or GOT (*have got/’ve got/’s got/*), we coded each token for a number of different factor groups: function (possessive or deontic), temporal boundedness (temporary or unbounded), the abstractness (concrete or abstract) and specificity (specific or generic) of the object, and the type of subject. We also coded for the individual speaker and the speaker’s ethnic background (British/Irish, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Punjabi and Portuguese), sex and degree of ethnic orientation (high or low).

The conditioning of the variation by language-internal factor groups is largely in line with the findings of previous studies: NP subjects strongly favor HAVE, while *they* and generic *you* strongly favor GOT (possibly reflecting collocational effects); generic objects favor HAVE; however, abstractness of the object was not selected as significant. There is clear evidence in apparent time for ongoing change, with younger British/Irish speakers leading in the rise of HAVE in both possession and deontic modality, though younger speakers of different ethnic backgrounds exhibit different degrees of participation in this change, and different patterns for each function. These results parallel those for phonological changes, in which the underlying linguistic system is shared by all speakers but each ethnic groups shows different overall rates. The availability of this variable for social conditioning suggests also that it is better considered as a lexical rather than a grammatical variable.

References

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